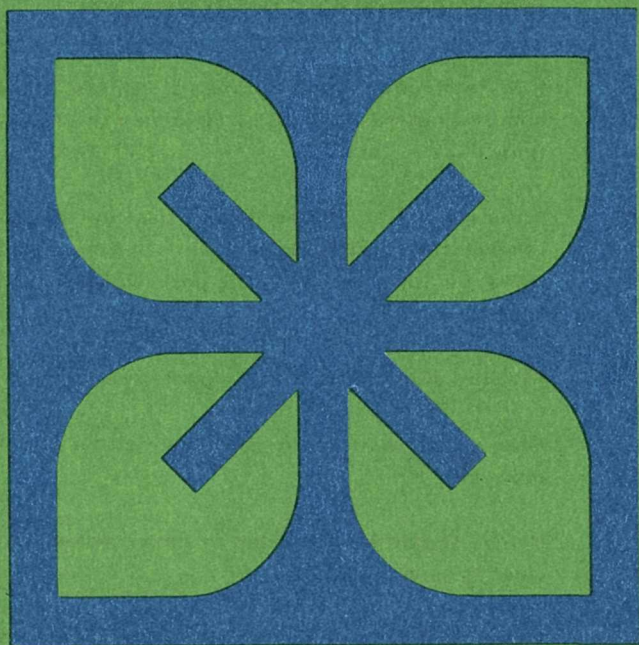


Rock Creek Park





Natural History

The jumbled mass of rocks and ledges along Rock Creek represents an ancient mountain range devoid of any significant forms of life.

In time, the rocks slowly decayed and were carried away by wind and water until only the roots of the ancient mountains remained. The broad, eroded surface that developed extended from what we now call the Blue Ridge Mountains eastward to the Atlantic. Crustal movements caused this relatively level surface to tilt, and the eastern part of it was submerged. A new cycle of erosion set in, and the clay, sand, and gravel carried from the higher western region were deposited on the submerged surface. These sediments built up to form the Coastal Plain, extending from Washington, D.C., to the Atlantic Ocean. The surface west of Washington, created by the removal of the material that formed the Coastal Plain, is called the Piedmont.

The boundary between Piedmont and Coastal Plain follows roughly the eastern side of Rock Creek Park, but both Piedmont rock and Coastal Plain deposits are within the park.

In Rock Creek Valley the forest was destroyed during the Civil War, when most of the trees were cut; but nature has a way of healing scars caused by man or fire. New trees grew to replace those lost. Once more a mature forest grows in the valley.

When you explore this beautiful forest, notice the difference between the plants of the valley floor and those on the ridges. Plants needing much moisture live on the flood plain of Rock Creek. Sycamore, yellow-poplar, red maple, red ash, and river birch are the largest trees here. Smaller trees include American hornbeam and pawpaw. Shrubs such as witchhazel, alder, spicebush, and pinxterbloom azalea form an understory.

Wildflowers are most abundant on the flood plain, especially in the northern section of the park. Blooming starts in late winter with skunk cabbage, which grows in the wettest soil. Bloodroot, fawn-lily, toothwort, and springbeauty bloom in March or early April. In late April golden groundsel and Virginia bluebells appear. The flood plain in spring is a green carpet splashed with colorful flowers.

On the drier ridges, pignut and mockernut hickory, white ash, black cherry, black locust, yellow-poplar, beech, and several species of oak make up the forest canopy. The understory includes dogwood, mountain-laurel, pinxterbloom azalea, and sassafras. A few sucker sprouts and occasional graying stumps or logs are the only remnants of the American chestnut, formerly abundant and very useful to man and wildlife, but destroyed in the 1920's by disease. Groves of Virginia pine probably represent former pastures reclaimed when the park was created.

Wildflowers are not abundant on the ridges, but several kinds blossom during the early spring. Trailing arbutus, bloodroot, and hepatica bloom in late March or early April.

In earlier days, Eastern bison, black bear, deer, American elk (wapiti), and timber wolves roamed the valley of Rock Creek and nearby ridges. These large mammals are no longer here, but Rock Creek Park is still rich in wildlife, having probably the greatest variety in or around Washington.

Except for the abundant gray squirrels, mammals are not conspicuous in the park because they are active mainly at night. They include the raccoon, fox, opossum, flying squirrel, white-footed mouse, weasel, and muskrat. Look in wet sand along the streams for footprints of raccoons and muskrats.

Birds add their color and song to the forest scene. In spring and autumn the population swells as migrants rest briefly from their long journeys. In winter only hardy species such as the Carolina chickadee, white-throated sparrow, cardinal, crow, blue jay, woodpeckers, mallard, and nut-hatch remain. With the coming of warm weather, summer residents return and there is a flurry of activity as nests are built and families reared. A few common summer birds are the veery, wood-thrush, towhee, redstart, and cardinal. The pileated woodpecker is a year-round resident; but this shy bird prefers the more secluded parts of the park woodland.

Because of pollution, Rock Creek contains very little life. A few species of fish (including eels) swim in Rock Creek; crayfish and dusky salamanders are secretive dwellers of the tributaries.

Indians and Settlers

Before white men settled this area, Algonquin Indians lived in villages along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. They fished in Rock Creek, raised crops, and hunted in the forest for bison, deer, bear, wild turkey, and smaller animals.

In the southern section of the park, along the shaded banks of Piney Branch, the Indians dug out rounded quartzite stones for making weapons and tools. The forests and passing time have nearly obliterated visual evidence of the quarries.

Early settlers built gristmills and a sawmill on the creek, using water to power the heavy machinery. Local farmers brought their corn, wheat, buckwheat, and rye to the gristmills to be ground into flour or meal.



Information

For information about the park, use these local telephone numbers:

Park Headquarters	426-6834
U.S. Park Police	426-6680
Nature Center	426-6829
D.C. Department of Recreation (picnic permits)	673-7647
Horse Center	362-0117
Dial-A-Park (recorded information)	426-6975

For written information, folders, and schedule on Rock Creek Nature Center and Peirce Mill, write: park manager, Rock Creek Headquarters, 5000 Glover Road NW, Washington, DC 20015.

For information on Rock Creek Park in Maryland, call or write: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring MD 20907. Telephone 589-1480.

WE'RE JOINING THE METRIC WORLD

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations.

Administration

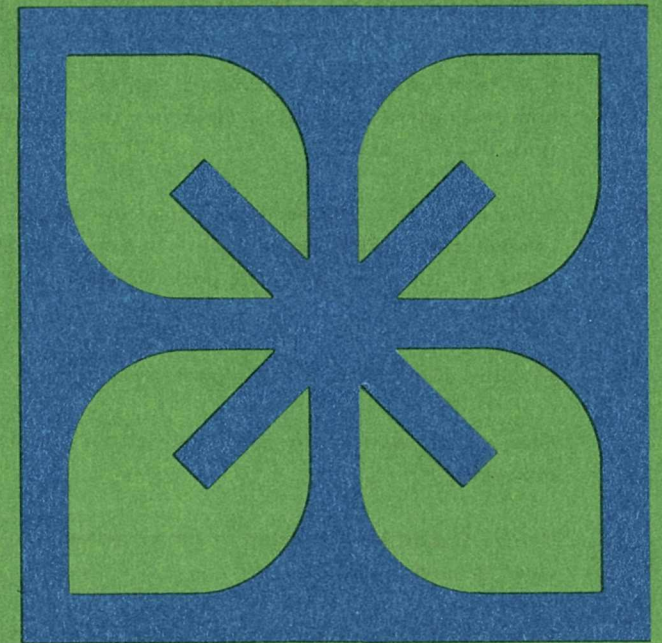
Rock Creek Park is a woodland area of 710 hectares (1,754 acres) about 6.4 kilometers (4 miles) long and 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) wide, in Washington, D.C. The park, established on September 27, 1890, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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Rock Creek Park



What to See and Do

Park Police Substation and Visitor Information Center is located south of Military Road on Beach Drive.

Rock Creek Nature Center will help you gain greater understanding and appreciation of the park's natural features. There is an exhibit hall, an auditorium, and a planetarium. Although exhibits and programs at the nature center are designed for young people, adults also find them stimulating. In the surrounding woodland are self-guiding nature trails and other interpretive aids.

Peirce Mill was built about 1820 by Isaac Peirce and his son Abner, and operated commercially as a gristmill until about 1900. It was restored in 1936, and is now open to the public.

Conducted nature walks and hikes start at the Rock Creek Nature Center on Glover Road and at other locations in the park. Information is included in the Rock Creek Nature Center seasonal schedule and in the printed monthly calendar of events of the National Capital Region.

There are about 24 kilometers (15 miles) of trails, with footbridges across Rock Creek. Hikers may also use bridle trails.

Horseback riding can be enjoyed on 23 kilometers (14 miles) of wide, graveled bridle trails traversing a varied park landscape. Riders can also use the jumps at the Equitation Field on Glover Road.

Rock Creek Horse Center, near the Nature Center on Glover Road, offers rental horses and riding instruction. Other stables are north of the District line in Maryland.

Rock Creek Park has facilities for tennis, football, baseball, softball, volleyball, horseshoes, picnicking, and archery.

Picnicking. There are about 70 picnic groves, with tables, benches and, usually, a fireplace. Bring your own fuel. Small shelters are provided at several groves. Some of the groves can be reserved in advance.

Reservations for tennis courts should be made through Government Services, Inc., 1135 21st St. NW.; for other facilities, reservations are obtained through the D.C. Department of Recreation, 3149 16th St. NW. (telephone 673-7647).

Carter Barron Amphitheater. Summer-evening programs at this outdoor theater in a woodland setting include musicals, operas, folk and modern music, and ballet with international artists. Ample parking. Tickets are available at the box office.

Rock Creek Golf Course. The clubhouse for this 18-hole course has locker rooms, pro shop, lounge, and refreshment bar. There is a greens fee.

Regulations and Safety

U.S. Park Police protect and assist visitors. You can help and have a safe visit by observing these regulations:

Natural features. Please do not destroy, injure, or remove trees, shrubs, flowers, birds or other animals, rocks, or other objects in the park. No collecting is permitted.

Fires are permitted only in designated picnic areas.

Pets are allowed in the park only under physical restraint.

Refuse should be deposited in the receptacles provided to keep the park clean.

Wading, swimming, and fishing are not permitted in Rock Creek or its tributaries because of the polluted water.

Trails can be slippery; please be careful hiking.

